Appendix I: Review of Leo Strauss' *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft*

Gerhard Krüger

1.1 Translated from the German

In this learned, specialized historical investigation, there is concealed a fundamental philosophic discussion of *the problem of the Enlightenment*. This study is as instructive for the philosopher and the theologian as for the expert on Spinoza and the historian of general intellectual history. [Geistesgeschichte]

If, for the philosopher, there must be nothing which is "self-evident," then that is valid also for the Enlightenment, which forms the intellectual foundation of modern culture. As its name [Aufklärung] indicates, it understood itself essentially as the "exit of man from his self-caused immaturity" (Kant), that is, as a critique of revealed religion. In tracing out this long-forgotten argument, *Strauss* brings to light how very problematic even the argumentative "refutation" of revealed religion remained, how much the *faith* in science contributed to helping science to victory. Strauss proceeds with a remarkable impartiality from the *teachings* of the critics back to their contestable *motives*, which define the specific and historical structure of their claim to truth. By bringing these motives into the open, motives which are still influential today, he is able to recall the historical vitality of this struggle.

It has been known since Dilthey that, in the formation of the "natural system" in the seventeenth century, the tie to the *Stoa* played an important role. Strauss elaborates on this picture, in portraying the critique of religion in the seventeenth century as a "stage in the overall history of the critique of religion in general" (p. 2; 35); from Democritus through Epicurus, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume to Feuerbach and Marx there extends one tradition whose classical representative is *Epicurus* (p. 11f; 45f). "The Epicurean critique of religion is one source, and indeed the most important one, for the seventeenth century critique of religion" (p. 4; 38); the influence of Epicurus "is at least equal to the influence of the Stoa," although it rests much less on a comprehensive "rebirth" of the teaching than on a re-awakening of the old motive (p. 17; 49). While according to the dominant view, it is above all the new sovereignty of man enlightening himself which emerges, Strauss' theme enables him to demonstrate how much this man finds himself originally *on the defensive*: tormented by religion's threats of the beyond and driven back and forth by the anarchy of sects, he demands, above all, a truth which brings *reassurance*, *softening*, and *consolation*. "Interest in the security and in the softening of life may be called the characteristic interest of the Enlightenment in general" (p. 199; 209). This "Epicurean" motive is in itself compatible with different possibilities for satisfaction—Moses Mendelssohn called immortality comforting, while for Marrano da Costa it threatened terrors (p. 28f; 58–9); but in the long run, it is, however, the *mechanical world-view* which most thoroughly satisfies the interest in truth as the "consoling truth" (p. 29; 60). As already in the case of Epicurus and Lucretius (p. 10f; 43f), the issue concerns the "opposition between the scientific view of the world, guided by the principle of continuity and therefore comforting, and the mythic-religious view, which refers back to the arbitrary working of divine powers and is therefore discomforting" (p. 85; 108). An "original inclination of the human heart" (p. 19; 51) ensures that on the one hand regularities are sought out—and, where they are not to be found in the "visible order" with Aristotle, they are *constructed* in an "invisible order" with atomism—while on the other hand a theologian like Calvin discovers the working of an unfathomable will "in every manifest disparity, irregularity, discontinuity" (p. 187; 198). Thus *one* unprovable orientation in the experience of the world stands here against the other; the opponents talk past each other to this degree. But, since it is nevertheless the same world which they experience, there is then also a common ground which becomes the battlefield in the specific dispute concerning

the revealed aspect of religion: it is *miracles* and the text of the *Bible*. Since Strauss can show that biblical criticism inherently presupposes the critique of religion—"distance" in regard to the Bible (see in particular p. 247ff; 251ff)—the issue is concentrated on miracles. Here it is a question of the direct, unambiguous manifestation of a divine, creative power for the "mere experience" of everyone (p. 103ff; 126ff). It is shown—not without a polemic against the "softening" in the whole of modern theology of the original concept of miracles, which applied to physical nature (p. 111, note 166, pp. 177, 204; 131, 190, 212)—that the "metaphysical critique" of miracles in Spinoza (and elsewhere), the proof of their impossibility in principle is not very convincing because in the decisive respect, in the dispute about the *sufficiency of reason*, it does not at all understand the opponent's position (p. 194ff; 204ff), and because it is itself subject to objection on the grounds of the anarchy of metaphysical systems (p. 121; 140). Much more effective and historically decisive was the "positive critique," which was silent about the "possibility" of miracles but contested in the concrete case the *knowability* of the miracle *as such*, while at the same time it undertook to explain the *faith* in miracles. "Human weakness," which viewed itself as incapable of explaining, is here taken not as grounds for faith but for skeptical suspension of judgment (p. 113; 133). And since miracles belong above all to the past, it is easy to explain the *reports* of them on the basis of the "prejudices of a people of ancient times" (p. 114ff; 134ff). Presupposed in this explanation is the "living experience of progress in the knowledge of nature" (p. 115; 134), which can take everything "unexplainable" as something merely not yet explained and which is *historically conscious* at the same time of its fundamental superiority over the "ancient" in the sense of the barbaric. (p. 117; 135) "Positive critique is legitimate only as *defensive* critique" (p. 127; 145). That is, it is "not strictly self-evident." Religion accuses the skeptic of obstinacy and of flight from a radical reflection on his sufficiency; critique cannot refute the claim to authority in principle, its skepticism can only *render laughable* certain banal consequences of this claim. "Reason must become 'spirit' [Geist] in order to be able actively to experience its more than royal freedom, its sovereignty which is incapable of being shaken by anything" (p. 127; 146). It must "laugh" the opponent out of his position (Lessing) (p. 125; 143).

It belongs to the most valuable insights of Strauss, both historically and in principle, that, in his analysis of the Enlightenment, he makes the ambiguous concept of freedom precise as the concept of *freedom from*

prejudice (p. 163ff; 178ff). "'Prejudice' is a historical category. Exactly for this reason, the struggle of the Enlightenment against prejudice is different from the struggle against appearance and opinion with which philosophy began its world-historical journey" (p. 167; 181). "The justification for - and at the same time the questionableness of - the category of 'prejudice' first becomes visible, and only then, when revealed religion is taken into consideration along with it" (p. 164; 179). The fundamental Epicurean orientation receives in modernity a decisive modification through the pre-existing fact of a "dogmatic" religion which intervenes with its *thought* in the *order of law* [Recht] *and state*. The struggle is no longer against the madness which is "fearful" only to the individual but also against the madness which is "dangerous" to the social peace, which is used by priests and kings in order to withhold earthly goods from the people (pp. 18f., 30, 200f, note 276, 215; 50f, 61, 209f, 224). Although for this last formulation, there are already familiar predecessors among the sophists, Strauss rightly finds here something new: the dogma of revealed religion contains quite a different restriction of *thought* within the community than did ancient myth. The Epicurean tradition is now supplemented by the legendary "averoistic" one, which shows the wise man in his *theoria* to be protected from the many by the "invention" of religion, and by the praise of "virtù," which already, in Machiavelli and Bruno, asserts the arguments of Nietzsche (p. 13ff; 48ff). The general discussion about the difference between modern and ancient thought receives here for once an "existential" sharpness: Strauss shows *in concreto* how much the modern "disposition of method, of culture" (p. 44; 71) is a *historical antithesis*, that is, an unprovable negative life-decision opposed to that past which believed in revelation.

The historical analyses within which this fundamental problematic comes to light lead from Epicurus first to some precursors of Spinoza's critique of religion: da Costa, La Peyrère, and Hobbes. The proof of the dependence of da Costa on Servetius and of La Peyrère on the Socinians is new. The exposition of Hobbes (cf. p. 222ff; 229ff) allows one to see that, in relation to Spinoza's still classical concept of happiness, he is the more modern and more radical. In Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* itself, Strauss uncovers a threefold argument: (1) with the *orthodoxy* (Jewish and Christian) which is plainly skeptical in regard to reason; (2) with that scholasticism of *Maimonides* which recognizes reason; and (3) with Calvin in whom the faith basis of orthodoxy first becomes quite radically visible. (In regard to this last point, Strauss has, in my opinion, overstated his overall

presentation of the basis in faith: as certain as it is that Calvin measures every teaching about God solely by "pietas," it is however clear in the first part of his *Institutio* that the *problem* of knowledge of God is common to all men as a "natural problem." But in the context of his comparison, Strauss hits indeed upon the essential thing.) Critique (of "scripture") on the basis of reason is carefully separated from a preliminary stage, "critique on the basis of scripture": by the exhibition of inconsistencies in the literal meaning of the text, the waverer is first of all to be freed for philosophy, and the essential content of the Bible is to be restricted to the moral demands of "piety" common to all of the scriptures. The demonstration that Spinoza could believe that he surpassed Calvin's teaching on predestination with his teaching of the Amor Dei is interesting (p. 190ff; 201ff). It is surely characteristic of the modern thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that it did not simply drop the theological problematic of the past but, by moving it to new ground, first introduced its atrophy—often contrary to its own expectations. The interpretation of the critical thought of Spinoza is completed by an investigation of his analysis of religion and its "social function" in the state. The observations of Spinoza on biblical criticism form the conclusion.

Strauss has understood throughout how to discover concrete historical situations behind the subtle inconsistencies of theory: the hope of La Peyrère for a political restoration of Judaism (p. 55ff; 79ff), Spinoza's "prudent" distance from Judaism in contrast to the rootedness of the ideas of Maimonides in membership in the Jewish community (p. 146ff; 157ff), Spinoza's "theoretical" hatred for ideological judgment in politics as distinguished from the really political coolness of Machiavelli (p. 218ff; 227ff), and, finally, the connection between Spinoza's doctrine of the state and the Netherlands' successful struggle for freedom (p. 236ff; 241ff). The presentation rests throughout on an exhaustive knowledge of the sources. An appendix gives materials for the analysis of the sources of da Costa and Spinoza; it reveals a comprehensive erudition.

The content of this inquiry is of unusual interest. But, it is regrettable that the author is at first tiring because of the *form* of his book. His very refined and complicated interpretations conceal the fundamental problem in many scattered places instead of expounding it coherently in its full compass. The work needs a more transparent arrangement of the whole and a more perceptible organization in individual parts. The analysis of religion by Hobbes and Spinoza, along with the accompanying teachings about the state, would certainly be better attached to the first paragraphs

of the introduction, together with the account of the essence of the Enlightenment. The specific divisions provided by the table of contents would very much facilitate the reading if they were still more detailed and indicated in the text by more than dashes. The *style* of the author often suffers from an all too great prudence, while at other places it can again become striking and lively.

Appendix II: Preface to *Hobbes politische Wissenschaft*

Leo Strauss

1.2

The present study of Hobbes, which now appears for the first time in the German original, was composed in 1934–35 in England and published in 1936 as an English translation. Ernest Barker wrote a preface for the English edition and I added an introductory note, which may now be replaced by the following comments: The leading thought of my Hobbes book arose from positive and negative stimuli received while I still lived in Germany. The first time I heard about Hobbes in a way that caused me to take notice was in the lectures of Julius Ebbinghaus on the social teaching of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, given in Freiburg im Breisgau in the summer semester of 1922. Ebbinghaus appreciated in an unconventional way the originality of Hobbes; in his lively presentation, Hobbes' teaching became not merely plastic but vital. He was anything but a Hobbesian; if my memory does not deceive me, he already believed at that time that the significant part of Hobbes' teaching had been "sublated in" ["aufgehoben"] the Kantian philosophy. Carl Schmitt, in quite unconscious opposition to Ebbinghaus, asserted in his essay, "The Concept of the Political" ["Der Begriff des Politischen"] (*Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1927), that Hobbes is "by far the greatest and perhaps the only truly systematic political thinker." Schmitt's judgment about the greatness and the significance of Hobbes, a judgment which corresponded to my feelings or taste at that time, strengthened, understandably, my interest in Hobbes.

My study of Hobbes began in the context of an investigation of the origins of biblical criticism in the seventeenth century, namely, of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise. The re-awakening of theology, which for me is marked by the names of Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig, appeared to make it necessary to investigate how far the critique of orthodox theology Jewish and Christian deserved to be victorious. Since then, the theological-political problem has remained the theme of my investigations. As far as the political, especially, is concerned, the contrast between Hobbes and Spinoza seemed to me at that time to be more important, more illuminating, than their agreement. In any case, I believed that I had learned, through my first study of Hobbes, that the prior accounts and apercus had not done justice to what is decisive in him. When a fate that was in a certain way kind drove me to England and I gained in this way access to sources which cannot be studied elsewhere, I saw the opportunity not to limit my work to an analysis of the teaching of the mature Hobbes but to investigate at the same time how and from what source this teaching had been formed in Hobbes' mind. This double intention gave the present study its character. Philosophic interest in theology linked me with Gerhard Krüger; his review of my Spinoza book expressed my intention and result more clearly than I myself had done.[1] The final sentence of his Kant book,[2] which corresponded completely to my view at that time and with which I would still today, with certain reservations, agree, explains why I directed myself wholly to the "true politics"[3] and why I did not write about Hobbes as a Hobbesian. Insight into the necessity of understanding the dispute of the ancients and the moderns more thoroughly and more exactly than had previously been done, before one decided for the modern or the ultra-modern, linked me with Jacob Klein; his "Die griechische Logistik und die Entstehung der Algebra" (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik, Band 3, Heft 1–2),[4] a masterly and exemplary investigation led by this insight, received the distinction of being passed over in near total silence in our everything-but-silent era.

As far as the defects of the present book are concerned, I have tacitly corrected them, so far as they have become known, in *Natural Right and History* (Chap. V, A) and in my critique of Polin's Hobbes Book (What is Political Philosophy?, pp. 170–96). Only in the latter publication (p. 176, note) did I succeed in laying bare the simple leading thought of Hobbes' teaching about man. For obscure reasons, Hobbes himself never did this; his famous clarity is limited to his conclusions, while his presuppositions

are shrouded in obscurity. His obscurity is, of course, not in every respect involuntary. What I stated 13 years ago in the Preface to the American edition of the present book, I will still allow to stand. I said then … [The remaining three paragraphs of this preface are a German translation of the "Preface to the American Edition" of *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).]

Notes

1. Krüger's review of Strauss' *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft: Untersuchungen zu Spinozas Theologisch-politischen Traktat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1930) is in the Deutsche Literaturzeitung, 1931, Heft 51 (December 20), p. 2407.
2. The last several paragraphs of Krüger's *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik* (Tubingen: Verlag J.C.B. Mohr, 1931) attempt to state the basis for a "philosophical, that is, unlimited questioning," in the light of the fact that, since Kant, "the *aporias* of the Enlightenment have become greater"; he argues that "Kant's problem is thoroughly contemporary," in that "The unpenetrated opposition of 'dogmatism' and 'skepticism' has become prominent in thought as in life itself with new sharpness, while the living and unifying *tradition*, upon which the Enlightenment fed, has disappeared and been replaced by the *historicism of knowledge*." The concluding sentences of the book may be translated as follows: "The question will only be in reality unlimited, if it *inquires into the good in the knowledge of the historical passion*. Let the *answer* to this question—and thus also the Christian answer of Augustine—be left undecided. That the decisive question remains true, even if it finds no answer, can be taught him who questions thus by the example of Socrates."
3. This term occurs in Kant's "Zum Ewigen Frieden," Anhang, I, end, in: Immanuel Kant, *Kleinere Schriften zur Geschichtsphilosophie Ethik und Politik*, ed. Karl Vorlander (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1964), p. 162. See the translation of "Perpetual Peace" in: Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 128.
4. Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968).